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ABSTRACT

The Department of Mass Communications at the Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIUE) has direct oversight responsibility for radio station WSIE, a National Public Radio affiliate and the second-highest-rated public radio station in the state of Illinois. WSIE employs just five full-time radio professionals. The great majority of the workers are SIUE students. Mass communications students begin their relationship with WSIE by volunteering and, after completing core courses, they can become part-time employees in either the production or news departments. Students in an upper-division Electronic Media News course also work at the station as part of the course requirements. Students working at WSIE have the opportunity to make many connections with nearby Saint Louis media professionals and prominent newsmakers. (RS)

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WSIE-FM News and the Mass Communications Department Curriculum

By Ralph R. Donald
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A presentation on a panel entitled,
"Showcase of College Radio Newscasts:
How to Make Your Radio Newscast a Success,"

To the 1999 Convention
of the Broadcast Education Association
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R. Donald

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WSIE-FM News and the
Mass Communications Department Curriculum

By Ralph R. Donald

In a way, this presentation takes my career around full circle, because it was here in Las Vegas that I broke into broadcasting, after almost six years as a newspaper reporter and copy editor. And now I'm here today as a veteran educator to talk about what we do at my university to help students prepare to break into the radio news business.

Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville is situated near the bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River, about 20 minutes' drive from downtown Saint Louis. S-1-U-Edwardsville is a 35-year-old, state-assisted, comprehensive university with a student body of 12-thousand.

Our radio station is WSIE, 88.7 on the F-M dial. It's affectionately known on campus as "Whizzie." At 50,000 watts and with a transmitter antenna 486 feet above average terrain, WSIE reaches the majority of the two-point-five-million Saint Louis market. With a jazz format and a

large news and sports commitment, this N-P-R affiliate is the second-highest-rated public radio station in the state of Illinois. The Department of Mass Communications has direct oversight responsibility for WSIE.

WSIE employs just five full-time radio professionals. The great majority of WSIE workers are SIUE students. All newscasters are students, who work closely with News Director Tom Dehner, a 25-year radio news veteran. The station manager, Frank Akers, is also a radio newsman.

Newsroom policies and procedures are modeled after KMOX-AM, a recognized leader in radio news and the highest-rated station in the St. Louis Market. News Director Dehner has extensive experience at KMOX

Mass Communications students may begin their relationship withWSIE as soon as their freshman year, by walking in the door and asking to do volunteer work. Later, when students have completed the department's

core of writing, reporting and production courses and proven their skill as volunteers, they can become part-time WSIE employees in either the production or news departments. Currently WSIE employs 20 students: half are assigned to the news department.

Non-majors can also work for WSIE, either through the volunteer-to-part-timer route, or for course credit.

Students in my upper-division Electronic Media News course also work at WSIE News as part of the course requirements. This course is designed to give broadcast journalism students advanced experiences in radio and television newswriting and production. The lab component for the radio portion of the course is an assignment to work on the WSIE News staff for the semester. Students must log a minimum of one three-hour shift each week of the semester for a total of 45 hours outside of class. The students' work is evaluated on-site by the News Director, who reports their performance to me. The News Director awards them points in my course in proportion to their overall performance.

Students working at WSIE have the opportunity to make many connections with Saint Louis media professionals and prominent newsmakers - celebrities, public officials and business leaders. For example, three student reporters were credentialed to cover Pope Paul the Second's Saint Louis visit in January.

Students who work at WSIE also cover a range of sports events, both as news correspondents and live. Currently, student play-by-play and color announcers cover all the S-1-U-E Cougar basketball games. They also do live and taped reports on other Cougar sports teams, and Saint Louis Cardinals, Rams and Blues home games.

(Note: A two-minute WSIE News air check by student anchor/reporter Molly McNamara was played next.) Molly has just been hired as an intern with KMOX News this summer, and just received a large

scholarship funded by the estate of legendary KMOX newsman bob Hardy.

Thank you very much.

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